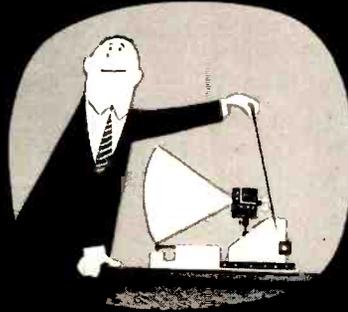




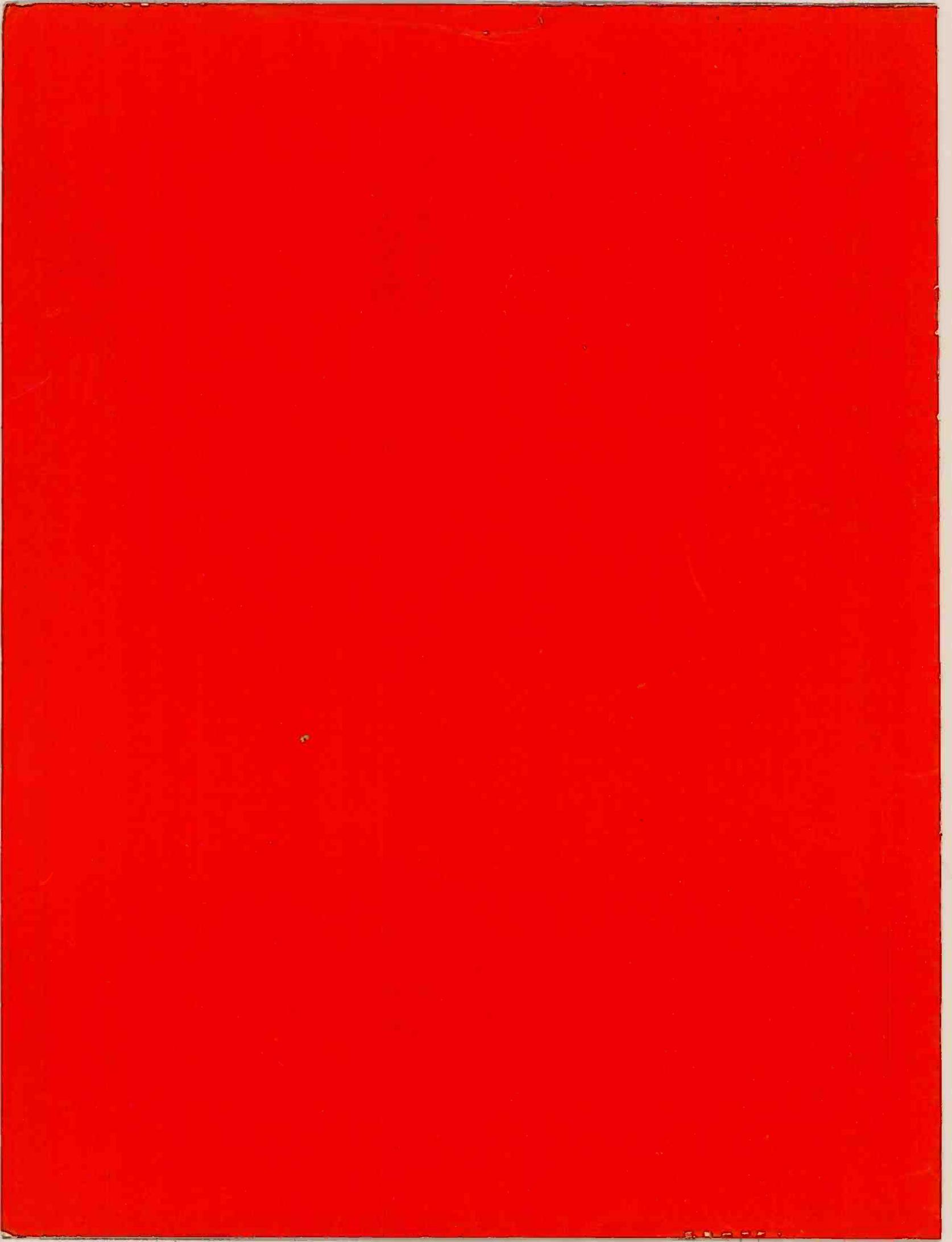
NATIONAL BROADCASTING COMPANY



how

to increase the effectiveness of television commercials





how to increase the effectiveness

of television commercials

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how to increase the effectiveness of television commercials

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NATIONAL BROADCASTING COMPANY

a service of Radio Corporation of America

FOREWORD

In the past few years advertisers' total TV expenditures (time, program and commercial) have grown from \$10,000,000 in 1948 to a figure exceeding \$500,000,000 in 1952. During this development period NBC has conducted extensive research on the influence of television advertising and has made the findings available to the entire industry.

These NBC studies were major and pioneering projects . . . in scope . . . in concept . . . in the nature and significance of the findings. The first was "The Hofstra Study," published in 1950. It was followed a year later by "Television Today," a detailed analysis of the sales impact

of television on 143 package goods brands and 45 durables. Early in 1952 NBC released "Summer Television Advertising"—a critical examination of the sales performance of 52 summer-advertised TV brands and their vacationing competition.

The common finding in all these investigations is that television is amazingly efficient in adding extra customers. These studies provide the solid "reason why" for TV advertising.

The present volume goes one step further: it explores through research the ways in which advertisers can make their TV commercials even more effective.

This report contains actual trial-and-error experiences of many television advertisers, and from such measurements there are lessons which can help others win greater returns from their TV investments. NBC hopes that its publication of these research findings will prove to be a valuable contribution to the television industry.

National Broadcasting Company

November, 1952

INTRODUCTION

It can come as no surprise to anyone to learn that some advertisers use television more efficiently than others. Thus, in "Television Today," we found that while TV advertising created an average of 15.6 extra customers per month per dollar for 143 package goods brands, individual brands showed wide variations—in both directions—from this average figure. In one product category, for example, the most efficient brand received a return from its TV dollar eight times as high as that obtained by one of its TV competitors.

If the average represents what can be expected, then the top figure in any series represents what can be achieved. The body of this report, consisting of research findings on TV commercials obtained by the Schwerin Research Corporation, is concerned with specific techniques of TV commercial presentation to help advertisers reach these higher goals.

As a leader in the development of commercial television NBC shoulders a continuing responsibility to the users of the medium. Our publication of this report affirms a deep interest in helping advertisers make their TV campaigns as effective as possible. Of course the direct responsibility for the success of any campaign lies with the advertising agency and its creative people. They are the ones who have contributed so heavily to the development of tele-

vision as a salesman. These craftsmen, naturally concerned with the persuasiveness of their creative skill, may find it valuable to review the documented experience of others. NBC's contribution is that of making available these tested commercial principles which have heretofore been shared by a limited number of TV users. NBC has turned to the Schwerin organization, which has conducted investigations on broadcast advertising since 1935, and the network has processed these findings for anyone seeking ways to make his TV dollar more efficient.

The investment an advertiser makes when he goes on television includes a significant amount for the commercials themselves—60-second films can cost several thousand dollars, up to \$10,000 if the advertiser can afford to go that high. At these costs, and with millions of viewers to be influenced, the commercial has got to be right.

Furthermore, improving the "rating" of the sales message can be just as profitable as improving the program rating. It can usually be done more readily and at far less cost, too.

In this study the emphasis is on the presentation of the commercial rather than on its content or format. Whether the commercial should stress price or quality or taste or ease of preparation or durability—that is completely outside the scope of this report. Similarly, we do not concern ourselves with whether the commercial should take the form of live action or animated cartoon or jingles. But whatever the sales appeal may be . . . whatever format it may take—the commercial cannot be effective unless the viewer remembers it.

And other things being equal, the more viewers who remember it . . . the more clearly they remember it . . . the more favorably they remember it . . . the more successful the commercial will be. In addition, there is an extra bonus to increasing commercial remembrance: research evidence suggests rather strongly that the more they remember, the more they believe.

Increasing commercial remembrance

The problem boils down to this: what can the advertiser do to get more viewers to remember and respond to the sales points in his TV commercials?

To provide an answer, NBC worked with the Schwerin Research Corporation. This is an organization with a vast fund of experience in this special field. With a number of major advertisers as clients, the Schwerin Corporation has tested approximately 2,000 different TV commercials for several hundred different nationally-advertised products. The purpose of these tests was to discover what sales points were remembered, and why they were remembered. While a full description of the Schwerin technique is contained in the appendix, the following brief review of the testing method will enable the busy reader to grasp the significance of the findings more easily.

Each commercial is tested at an audience reaction session attended by about 350 people who have been attracted through a variety of media. These people fill out detailed, personal questionnaires and then view the commercial, either as part of the whole program, or as a spot at the end of a short "control" program. Immediately after the screening they are requested to write down the brand name of the product advertised and everything about it they remember having seen or heard in the commercial. Often, too, at a later point in the session, they are asked whether they believe certain key claims made in the commercial.

The sales points remembered by the audience are later coded, and the number of viewers retaining each idea is computed. In the rest of this report these individual cases of remembrance are referred to as "responses."

A number of commercials for the same product are tested at different audience reaction sessions. The respondents are then properly matched, with the final sample controlled for physical, socio-economic, viewing and product-use factors. If a sales idea wins a significantly larger number of responses in

one commercial than in another, further investigation is conducted to determine which factors tended to make one method of presentation more effective than another.

The insight obtained through such analysis, clarified and strengthened through repeated confirmation in tests of other commercials for different products, has been refined into general principles which can serve as guideposts to more effective TV commercials.

It is these Schwerin principles which are reported here, together with a number of case histories which illustrate specific applications and variations of the principle. For obvious reasons, these commercials have been somewhat disguised and brand names omitted. However, the principles involved and the test results are in no way altered.

As you go from the discussion of one principle to another it becomes increasingly clear that the findings put a premium on good thinking and bold imagination. For these principles are not "tricks" which automatically grind out good commercials. They merely establish boundaries marking off the wide areas in which creative initiative has full play. The generous use of case histories in this book underscores the fact that there is no one "right" way of presenting an idea effectively. There are innumerable variations of the "right" way. Almost as many, in fact, as doing it wrongly.

What must be most reassuring both to creative people as well as the advertisers themselves is that the principles of good TV techniques make good common sense. And the rewards for observing them were never greater.

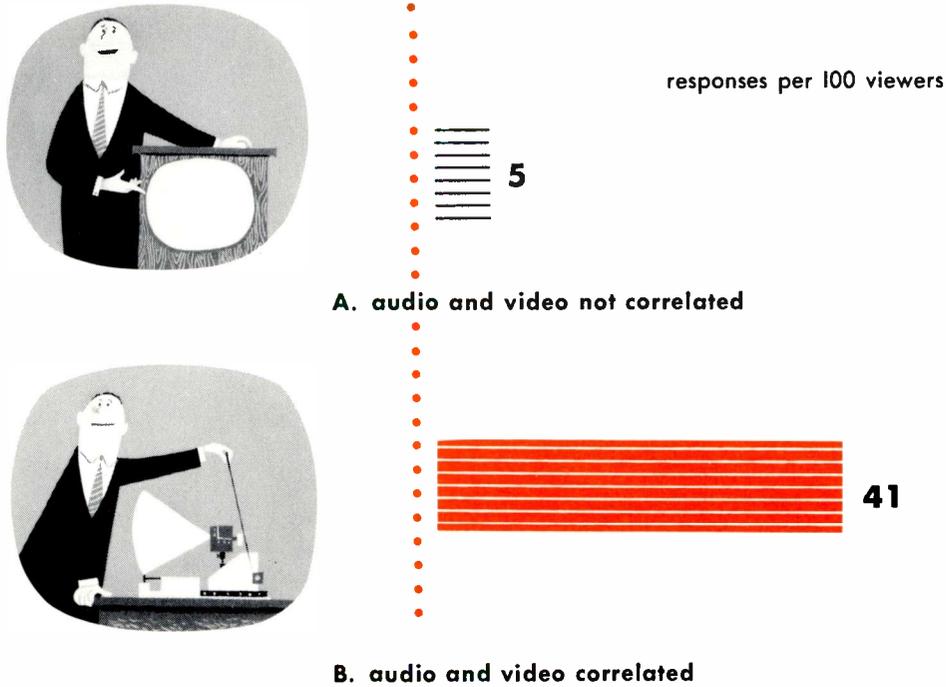
This is the promise this report holds for television advertisers.

CORRELATE AUDIO AND VIDEO

The distinguishing feature of television is that it permits the advertiser to make a double sensory impression on his audience: he can appeal to the eye and to the ear — at the same time. One of the basic Schwerin findings is that the TV commercial is more effective when the audio and video are used simultaneously to convey a single thought. It's more effective than using either one; it's more effective than using the video for one idea, while the audio is treating some other idea.

There are no “short-cuts” to the mind. The advertiser who thinks that he is getting two points over at the same time by showing one feature of his product while the announcer is discoursing on another, is simply deluding himself and weakening his commercial. Failure to have the voice and picture tell the same story, at the same time, is probably the most common error on the TV screen. It's such a simple, obvious rule that it is often overlooked when the producers are checking some other aspect of the presentation.

sales idea: special engineering features



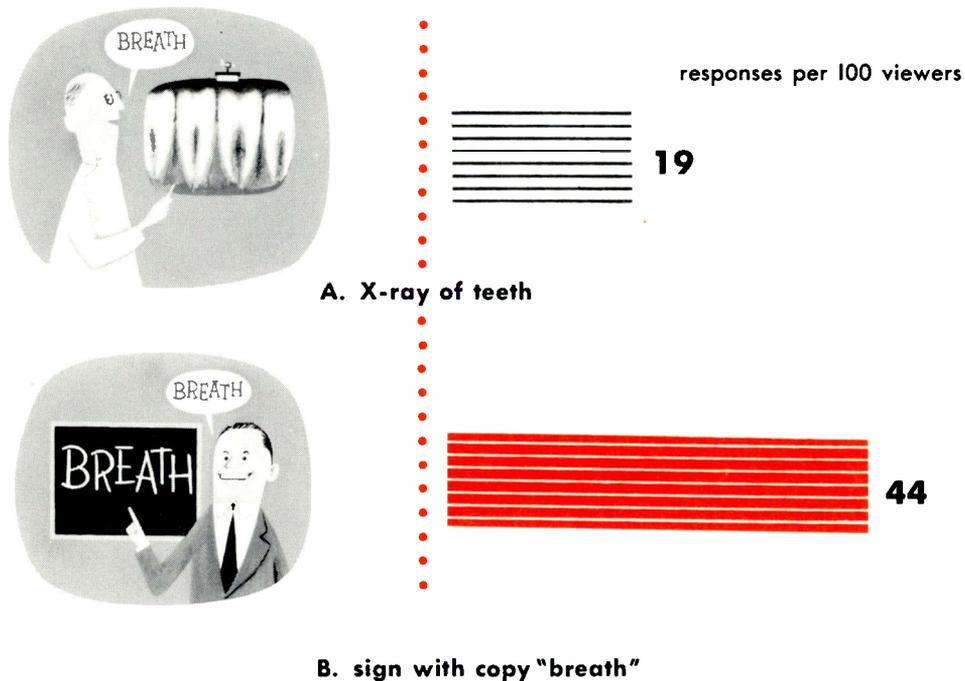
The principle is vividly illustrated by two commercials for a television receiver. The manufacturer wanted to convince prospective buyers that his product was so engineered that it would not become obsolete with future advances in TV broadcasting. Two commercials were tested for this idea. In one, illustration "A", above, the announcer told the engineering story while standing beside the set to which he pointed at appropriate times. In the second version, illustration "B", the announcer told the same story. But when he was talking about the special engineering features he pointed to parts in the exposed chassis and identified them as the elements which made possible the set performance he was describing.

Commercial "A" did not correlate the audio and video. The audio was engi-

neering; the video was, for lack of a better description, cabinet work. Commercial “B” did correlate audio and video. When the audio was engineering, the video was engineering (specific parts in the mechanism). The audience scores on these commercials emphasize the importance of correlation. For when matched samples, exposed to each of these commercials, were asked to list what they remembered about the set, the researchers found a vast difference in the recall of the engineering features. On this sales point, Commercial “A” received only 5 responses per 100 viewers. Commercial “B” won 41 responses per 100 viewers.

Eight times as many viewers remembered the sales point after seeing the commercial in which the audio and video were tightly integrated.

sales idea: cleans breath

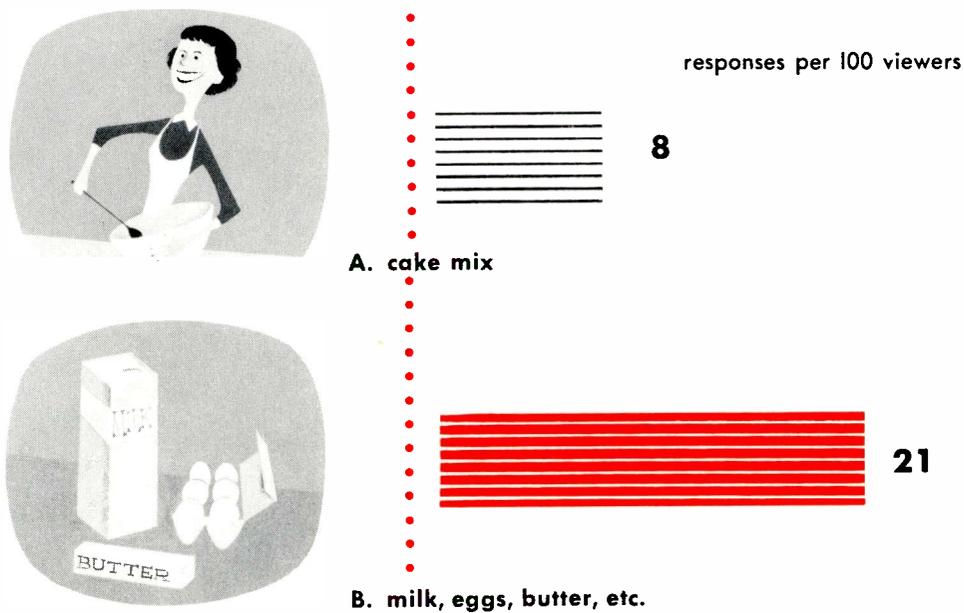


Here is another example which shows how even the most elementary correlation will lift the recall of a sales idea.

The central sales idea in two commercials was that the product created a pleasant breath. In Commercial "A" they made the claim while showing an X-ray picture of teeth. In Commercial "B" the word "Breath" filled the screen while the announcer was discussing the same idea. The second version won 44 responses per 100 viewers on this sale point, while the first treatment received only 19 responses per 100 viewers.

This example illustrates another point: if it is difficult to create a picture that accurately illustrates an intangible idea (clean breath, in this case), presenting the idea in the form of video copy can often be an effective substitute. It has the merit of creating a unified, simultaneous impression on the eye and ear.

sales idea: quality of product



However, creative ingenuity can often discover ways of illustrating even the most difficult concepts. On the opposite page are examples which show how effectively audio and video can be correlated—even when the idea is an intangible; in this case, the quality of the product.

In two commercials for a prepared baking mix, the audio copy was the same: the quality of the product was assured through the use of the finest ingredients. In Commercial “A” the point was made while showing a housewife using the mix. The choice ingredients were the reason why the mix invariably produced delicious cakes. That treatment won a recall of 8% for the quality story.

In Commercial “B” the video very literally followed the audio copy. When the announcer spoke about fresh, rich milk, the screen showed milk being poured from a pitcher. When he spoke about fresh eggs, the video consisted of a number of eggs being taken from a newly-opened carton. As each ingredient was mentioned, it was simultaneously shown on the screen. This treatment, with a high continuity of audio and video, achieved a recall of 21% for the quality of the product. By making a double sensory impression on the audience, the impact of the sales idea was increased over 150%.*

Yes, the very obvious first principle for increasing the effectiveness of television commercials is to make sure that the audio and video are working together, simultaneously. The double sensory impression they create fixes the sales point more firmly in the minds of the viewers. As we have seen, it's a goal that can be readily achieved—even when selling intangibles. And as the scores point out so uncompromisingly, it's a goal very much worth striving for.

*Having shown findings on several sets of commercials, we would, at this point, like to warn the reader against “cross-comparisons” of Schwerin scores on different sets of commercials. For levels of the figures may be affected by the extraneous factors: basic strength of the sales idea, number of other product advantages claimed in the same commercial, degree of interest in the product, familiarity with the sales idea, etc.

DEMONSTRATE... DEMONSTRATE... DEMONSTRATE

Very closely allied to correlated audio and video is demonstration as a technique for increasing the effectiveness of TV commercials. People are more likely to remember advertiser claims of product performance if they see that performance demonstrated, i.e. proved. Whenever possible, therefore, a sales claim should be demonstrated—and described at the same time.



sales idea: cleans pan easily

responses per 100 viewers

A. results of product use



B. demonstration of product



The common sales idea in two commercials for a cleanser was that the product makes it easy to clean greasy pans. In one version, Commercial "A", the housewife was shown holding the cleanser in one hand and a nice shiny frying pan in the other. The pan was realistically clean. It looked as though it had been washed, not silver-plated for the benefit of the TV camera. The audio copy spelled out the rewards for product use: clean pots and pans with little effort. The audio and video were correlated to the extent that the clean pan was on the screen while the announcer talked about it. What was not demonstrated was the fact that you could achieve this result "easily." This treatment won 6 responses per 100 viewers. That is, only 6% of the respondents recalled the easy cleaning claims of the product.

A second approach to this sales point started by showing the housewife holding a greasy pan. It was clear from the audio and video that she didn't like the job of cleaning it any more than the next woman. But there was an easy way of doing it. She moved over to the sink . . . sprinkled the cleanser on the pan . . . swished the powder with a dish rag . . . rinsed and wiped. And before your very eyes, you saw a complete demonstration of the product's speed, ease and efficiency. 28% of the viewers of this commercial remembered that the cleanser cleans pans easily. A complete demonstration increased recall more than four times.

But even convincing demonstrations are not without their pitfalls. This is aptly illustrated by a shampoo on which commercial tests were run. A major sales point for this product is its high sudsing quality.

One commercial demonstrated this quality by showing a model washing her hair with the shampoo, which created a tremendous volume of suds. A second commercial showed *two* models washing their hair. One of them was using the advertised product; the other, an unnamed competing brand. Each used the same amount of shampoo. But the difference in the amount of suds produced was very much in favor of the advertised brand.

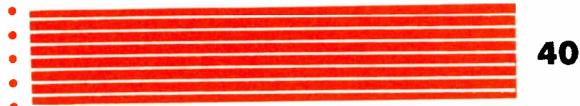
sales idea: produces lots of suds



A. simple demonstration



B. comparative demonstration



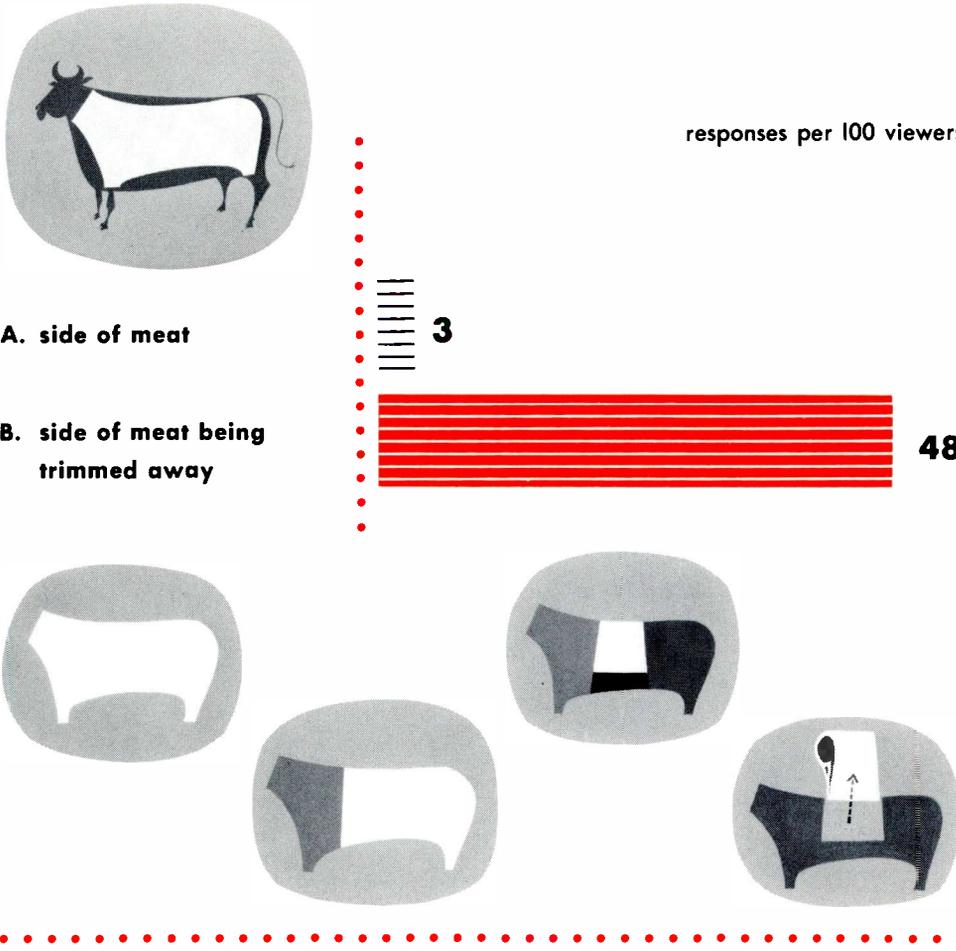
And the difference in recall of the sales point was very much in favor of the comparative commercial. It won 40 responses per 100 viewers as against 20 per 100 viewers for the simple demonstration.

The findings are easy to rationalize — after the results are seen. But the examples serve to point up the fact that even a convincing demonstration can be made more effective if the viewer is given a yardstick by which to measure the performance.

Even a sales point as intangible as “high quality” can be demonstrated by ingenious creative people. They were certainly put to the test in preparing commercials for a packaged meat product.

There were several sales ideas about the product for which almost all commercials won high recall: the careful packaging . . . the ease of preparation . . . and taste. But in every case the recall of the high quality was exceedingly low.

sales idea: quality of product



Finally, a very effective demonstration of "quality" was achieved. Commercial "B" showed a whole side of beef. Then cut after cut was trimmed away and discarded while the announcer explained that they did not meet the quality standards of the product. The meat that was finally left—the portion that went into the package—was certainly the choicest of the choice.

This demonstration won a recall of the quality theme by 48% of the respondents.

Further investigation of findings on this subject establishes the fact that the simplest and most realistic demonstrations invariably win the highest recall. Demonstrations which appear to be far-fetched or which smack somewhat of the sleight-of-hand are consistently less successful.

It is the good fortune of many manufacturers that their products lend themselves readily to demonstration. If they claim the product dissolves quickly, they can drop it in a tumbler and let the viewers see how swiftly it disintegrates. If the tires are puncture-proof, they drive them over upright nails with absolutely no loss of air. If the surface can withstand mistreatment, they can pour boiling water over it—crush cigarettes on it—right in front of the camera, and tell the viewers just what is going on.

For other advertisers, the search for the most effective demonstration device is more difficult. But, once they find the method, they can be sure that more viewers will remember the point they are trying to make.

KEEP IT SIMPLE

Concepts which seem so elementary in the conference room and which appear crystal clear on the story-boards can fail to make enough impression on the viewer to be remembered.

There is a sound reason for this: viewers are not as familiar with or as interested in the sales story as the advertiser is. They don't have the background he brings to the viewing of the commercial. They neither know nor care about the problems that had to be overcome in building the commercial.

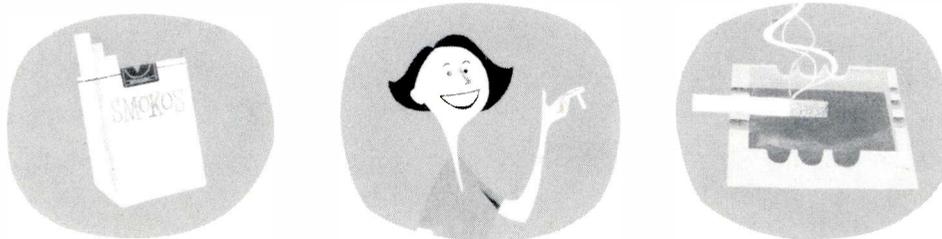
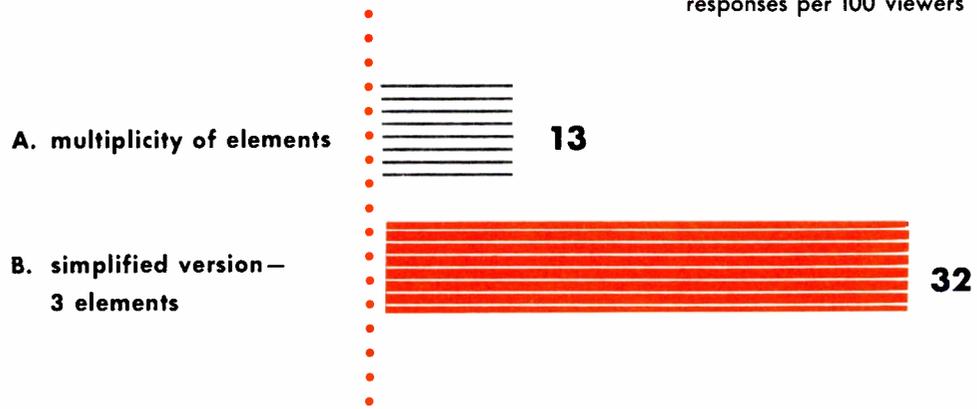
All this makes the viewer the Number 1 problem of the commercial. The commercial should make it easy for the viewer to grasp the sales points the advertiser wishes to bring out. And one device for achieving this, as highlighted by the findings, is to keep the commercial as simple as possible, both in terms of number of elements it contains and the way in which they are presented.

How simplification increases recall of the sales point is illustrated, in almost primer fashion, by a series of commercials for a personal product tested on the audience.

sales idea: mildness



responses per 100 viewers



The first version tested was a major film production. Within a period of 60 seconds, it introduced no less than 10 scenes. The announcer was shown extolling the product; then, in breathless succession came a product shot, a testimonial from an athlete, a second announcer, a shot of the product in use, another testimonial, etc., for a full minute. The score showed 13 responses per 100 viewers. It was a disappointing figure, for this was an expensive commercial, with high testimonial fees and production charges.

Various changes were made in the commercial, and it was observed that as the number of elements were reduced, the recall was increased. Finally, the commercial was completely simplified and reduced to three basic elements: a picture of the product with voice over . . . testimonial by a housewife and a final close-up of the product. This treatment won 32 responses per 100 viewers.

The first commercial was just too much for the viewers to digest. There was so much going on—so many different things happening so quickly—that the viewers were completely confused. They didn't know what to remember, and as a result they ended up remembering very little. The final version was not nearly as exciting as the first, but it followed the principle, "keep it simple." It was simple enough for viewers to remember the message. And that's the primary test every commercial must pass.

Simple sequence

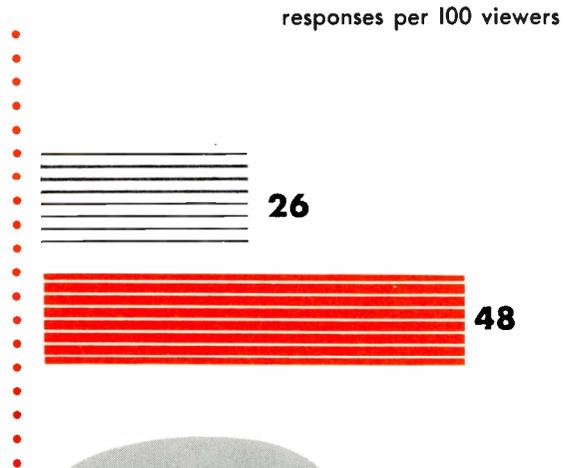
A somewhat different aspect of simplicity of structure is involved when cause-and-effect is being explained. If the product has feature "x" which produces advantage "y," it is usually more effective to present such ideas in sequence rather than try to illustrate both at the same time.

sales idea: insulation saves money



**A. component ideas
shown together**

B. simple sequence of ideas



An appliance manufacturer wanted to impress viewers with the fact that because of special insulation, the operating expense is reduced. The first commercial approach showed an announcer holding a sheet of the insulation in one hand and an electric bill in the other hand. In this treatment the advertiser was trying to convey two connected ideas at the same time. Tests showed a 26% recall of the sales point.

A second commercial developed these ideas in sequence. First, lower electric power consumption was explained. Then, when that point had been thoroughly made, the reason for it — the special insulation — was shown and described. Recall for the sales point increased almost 100% to 48 responses per 100 viewers.

Incidentally, general testing experience seems to indicate that it is usually more effective to present such sequences in the order of cause first, then effect. There are exceptions, however, as in the commercial just described. When it would not seem logical to viewers for the “effect” to follow the “cause” as swiftly as it must in the commercial, it’s better to reverse the normal sequence.

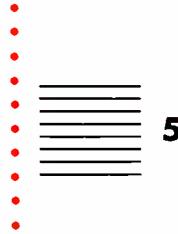
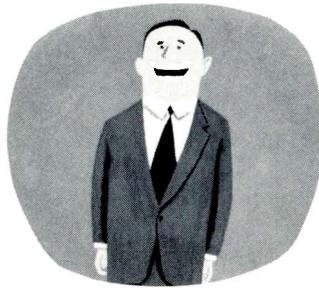
The Schwerin technique is essentially a memory test, but attitudes and believability are also measured when desired. A close relationship appears to exist between believability and recall, and this same appliance advertising demonstrates the point. When remembrance of “insulation” and “cuts electricity bill” was highest, belief of the claim was also strongest. In fact, this advertiser was able to double the audience conviction by raising recall responses from 26 to 48.

Recapitulation

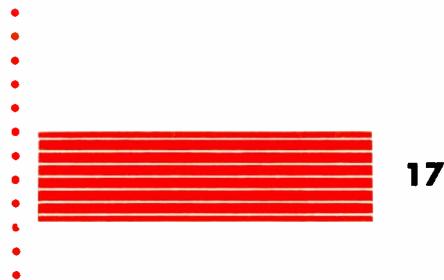
Within this broad area of keeping commercials simple, the investigations suggest that it is safer to err on the side of being too elementary than to be complicated. The findings bring to mind the trite formula used by professional after-dinner speakers: “Tell ’em what you’re going to say . . . say it — then tell ’em what you’ve said.” A clear recapitulation, or a summary of the sales points previously made in the commercial, can lift remembrance substantially. A single example will suffice to demonstrate this point.

sales idea: various

responses per 100 viewers



A. ideas presented in cartoon



B. cartoon ideas summarized by announcer

In these commercials for a household cleanser the sales points for the product were made in animated cartoons. In the first commercial the cartoon was followed by the announcer who urged viewers to put the product on their shopping list. The combined sales points in this commercial were recalled by 5% of the respondents.

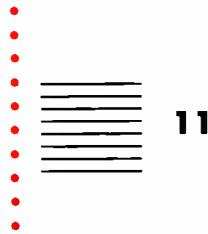
In the second version the cartoon element was untouched. But when the announcer appeared on the screen, before urging viewers to go out and buy — he summarized the sales points made in the cartoon. It was straight, simple recapitulation, with no elaboration whatsoever. The sales ideas were merely ticked off on the fingers of one hand. This device lifted recall from 5% to 17%.

Trick devices

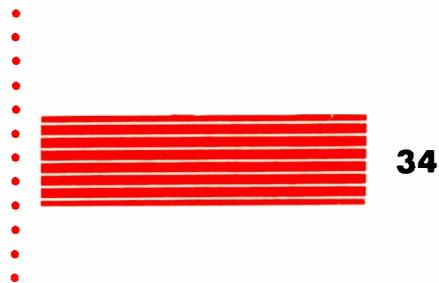
Something as simple as finger-counting is often rejected by commercial producers. They yield to the temptation which television offers the unwary — the trick shots and gadgets and montages and the million-and-one special effects television permits. There's no question that, properly used, these camera techniques can be very effective. But when they are mis-used, forced, or introduced simply for the sake of creating special effects, they weaken the very results they are seeking — advertising recall.

sales idea: product reputation

responses per 100 viewers



A. complicated montages and effects



B. simple visual content

In Commercial "A" the camera work could have qualified for a Hollywood award. The sales points involved before-and-after appearance, product in use, and lapse of time. Presumably to bring out these points, the camera produced montages of faces and places and dates. There were beautifully executed dissolves and superimpositions. Technically, it was a masterpiece. But the sales point achieved only 11 responses per 100 viewers.

In the second commercial the same sales points were made without the special effects. The camera work was exceedingly simple and the copy followed suit. And this simpler version achieved a response of 34 — three times as great as the most expensive production number.

The test results are very explicit on the use of special effects. The point they make is not to shun them absolutely, but to avoid using them merely because they are entertaining or novel or they represent a great technical feat. These very effects may prove to be distracting and confusing to the viewers, with inevitable loss of recall of the sales idea.

At the same time the findings encourage use of trick devices when the camera can be used to strengthen the sales point the commercial is trying to establish.

How ingeniously this can be achieved can be illustrated by another example from the files. The product represented a real challenge. It could best be described by explaining what it was not.

In one commercial the announcer was shown holding the product while he explained what it was not. The results were unsatisfactory, almost to the point of being non-existent. Only 2 viewers out of 100 recalled this feature of the product.

In another commercial the camera focused on a row of products clearly identifiable as a soap, a cream, a lotion, and finally, the advertised product.

sales idea: negative description



A. idea stated in audio

B. idea explained
by camera devices



2



20

responses per 100 viewers



When the announcer said the product wasn't a soap, the bar of soap disappeared from the picture; when he explained that it wasn't a cream, the jar of cream vanished. When he pointed out that it wasn't a lotion, the bottle of lotion was eliminated. When finally he said that the product was absolutely unique, there was nothing on the screen but the product itself. The effects were achieved through accurate, stop-motion camera work by men who realized that the camera was not simply an artistic medium, but could be made as commercial as the copy itself. With this sales use of trick devices the

advertising idea was recalled by 20 viewers per hundred — ten times as many as remembered it from the audio copy only.

“Padding” commercials

Simplicity not only applies to the presentation of sales ideas but also to the utilization of time. Several Schwerin case histories suggest that padding commercials to fill out the allotted time has a deteriorating effect—stretching most often weakens the degree of impact.

One commercial on a food product left the impression that much of the time was not usefully employed. The selling story was condensed into a version which ran 40 seconds shorter. And response to the capsule commercial was actually higher than it was in the full-length treatment. The scores were 61 and 54.

The unique character of television makes for rapid and complete communication. Thus, you don't need a “stopper” in television commercials. You don't need a lengthy lead-in. The show delivers the audience. The function of the commercial is to sell that audience. If you assign that one job to the commercial and make the sales points simply and quickly the entire effect will be substantially stronger.

USE THE RIGHT PRESENTER

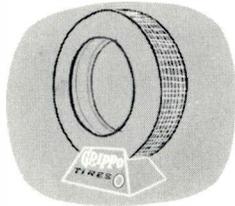
For more effective commercials the right person must be chosen to represent the product and present the idea. He or she should be compatible with the product or idea, and his identity and function should be clearly expressed.

This does not mean that the commercial producer should spend all his time in projection rooms looking for a new Dorothy Collins or Roy Marshall. It does not imply that the right presenter need even be a live performer. It would be hard to think of a “Kool” commercial without seeing a penguin, or a “Campbell Soup” commercial without the Campbell kids. Cartoon characters have proved themselves, according to scores, to be very effective presenters in very many cases. The essential fact is that whether it’s a person or animated character, he should be highly compatible to the selling job he is assigned to do.

Identify the presenter

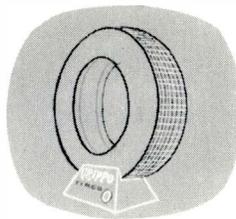
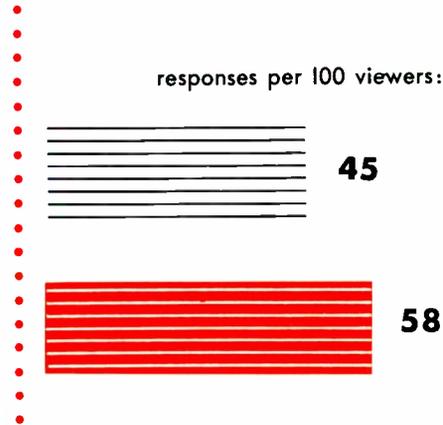
The first step in making full use of the presenter is to identify the speaker. Let the audience know who is doing the telling and the selling. This is the “keep it simple” aspect of using the right presenter.

identification of presenter



A. cartoon with unidentified voice over

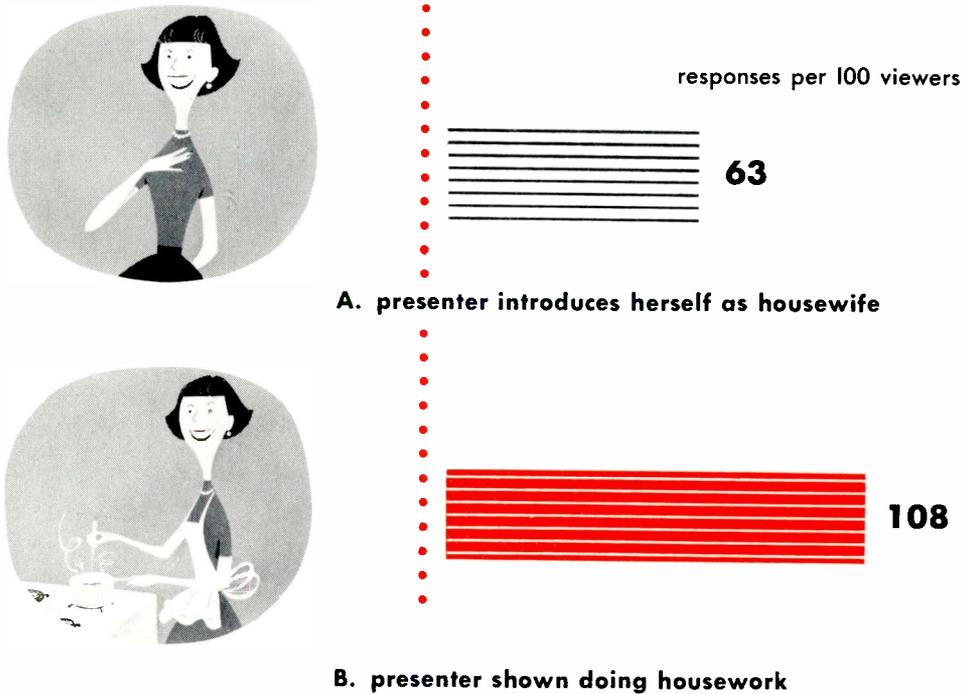
B. cartoon introduced by live announcer



How so simple a device as voice identification can lift recall is illustrated by two almost identical commercials. In both cases the selling points were made through cartoon treatment with voice-over. When the commercial consisted only of the cartoon and unidentified voice the sales idea won 45 responses per 100 viewers. The very same cartoon, preceded by a seen announcer who “introduced” the cartoon and whose voice was continued in the audio of the cartoon, won 58 responses per 100 viewers. In this latter instance, there was no distracting mystery about the voice, and the fact that the audience knew who was doing the talking was enough to lift recall almost a third.

There’s no need, however, to make a major production out of the presenter identification. In fact, if you can achieve it visually, the identification may be even more effective. And it has the further virtue of saving precious commercial seconds.

visual identification of presenter



In Commercial “A” the scene opened with an attractively dressed woman who looked directly at the audience, gave her name and interests, and explained that she was a housewife who used the product for a variety of reasons — the sales points in the commercial. These several sales points, together, won 63 responses per 100 viewers.

The second commercial opened by showing the same woman — in the kitchen. She was wearing an apron, standing at the stove. She stopped her work, turned to the audience and said that she used the product “because.” She made exactly the same sales points in exactly the same order. But in this version they won a recall of 108 responses per 100 viewers. There was no need for anyone to tell the audience she was a housewife. The identification was achieved visually and more realistically through the setting* and through her activities.

*This anticipates somewhat the findings in the next section, which deals with compatibility of setting.

Note that in both commercials the presenter was talking directly to the viewers. It's good practice. Test scores stress the fact that the relationship of the presenter to the viewer should be as direct as possible.

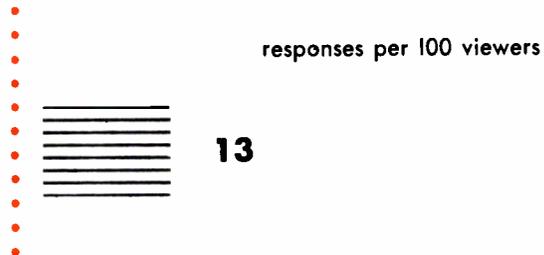
In several of the examples discussed we have described the audio copy as "voice-over" — sometimes identified, sometimes not identified. From the findings it would appear that direct speech (lip synchronization) is usually more effective.

In one test the demonstrator was a woman whose own voice was used in the audio. When it was presented as voice-over the sales points won 47 responses per 100 viewers. When she spoke directly to the audience (lip synchronization) the responses per 100 viewers increased to 67. The direct approach was substantially more effective.

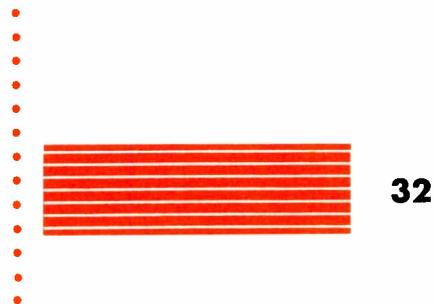
sales idea: clean shaves



A. steelworker as presenter



B. office worker as presenter



All of these cases have involved the same presenter who was compatible with the product. When different models are used the problem of compatibility becomes a little more acute.

The major sales point in a series of razor blade commercials was that the blade gives close shaves to tough beards. The point was made through testimonials by users of the product. In one commercial the testimonial was delivered by a steel worker; in another the same testimonial was given by an office worker. In each case the setting was appropriate for the testimonial. But the office worker testimonial received almost 2½ times as many responses as the steel worker commercial — the respective scores being 32 and 13.

Obviously, when it comes to razor blades and clean shaves the office worker strikes viewers as a more compatible presenter than a laborer. Further, the office worker may represent a character with whom viewers can more easily identify themselves than they can with a highly specialized construction worker.

"Authorities" as presenters

Another thought on this razor blade commercial is that a white collar worker is a better authority on clean shaves than a man whose work does not demand a daily shave. This introduces the whole subject of the use of authorities in television commercials, on which the Schwerin findings are very clear-cut. Wherever it is appropriate the use of an authority increases the recall of the sales points.

Doctors and dentists are generally accepted by viewers as proper authorities. Outside of these professions the authority may be somewhat suspect. Whom the advertiser selects as the authority may not be regarded by viewers as the person best qualified to present claims for the product. Thus, in several de-

odorant commercials the use of a white-coated druggist as the authority was not nearly as effective as the testimony of a typical woman presented not as an authority but as a logical, compatible presenter.

Even when an acceptable authority is used the commercial effectiveness can be increased when viewers see his advice being followed.

effective use of authority



A. doctor gives advice



B. doctor gives advice which is followed



responses per 100 viewers

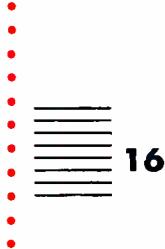
In two commercials for a cereal the presenter was a “doctor” who was shown giving a young mother professional advice on feeding her baby. In one commercial the scene in the doctor’s office was followed by an announcer who expanded the doctor’s remarks in his copy theme. In a second commercial, the scene in the doctor’s office was followed by a home scene: the mother feeding the baby the recommended cereal, a box of which was prominently displayed on the kitchen table.

Commercial “A”, which included authority and advice, won 8 responses per 100 viewers on a special sales point the advertiser was trying to make. Commercial “B”, which in addition to authority and advice showed the advice being followed, tripled the recall of that sales point.

mis-use of authority



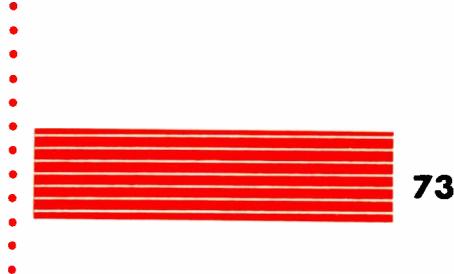
A. chef demonstrating baking mix



responses per 100 viewers



B. child demonstrating baking mix



If the authority is mis-used his presence may actually weaken the sales point the advertiser is trying to make. One set of commercials in the Schwerin files illustrates this very neatly. The product was a prepared mix; the sales theme was that the mix made it simple to achieve perfect baking results.

In one commercial the authority was a chef in a test kitchen, shown pulling some pastry out of the oven and explaining how simple it was to insure consistent baking success by using this mix. In a second commercial the same sales point was made by a little girl, who was exceedingly proud of the pastry she had just made with the product. The first commercial won 16 responses per 100 viewers; the second won 73.

Certainly a professional chef outranks a child as a culinary authority. But in this instance he was possibly too expert for the advertiser's purpose. What's simple for him may not be easy for the average housewife. He is, therefore, not nearly as logical a presenter of the advertiser's sales point as the little girl. If she can use this product and get good results with it, obviously any housewife would be able to attain the same results.

Distracting presenters

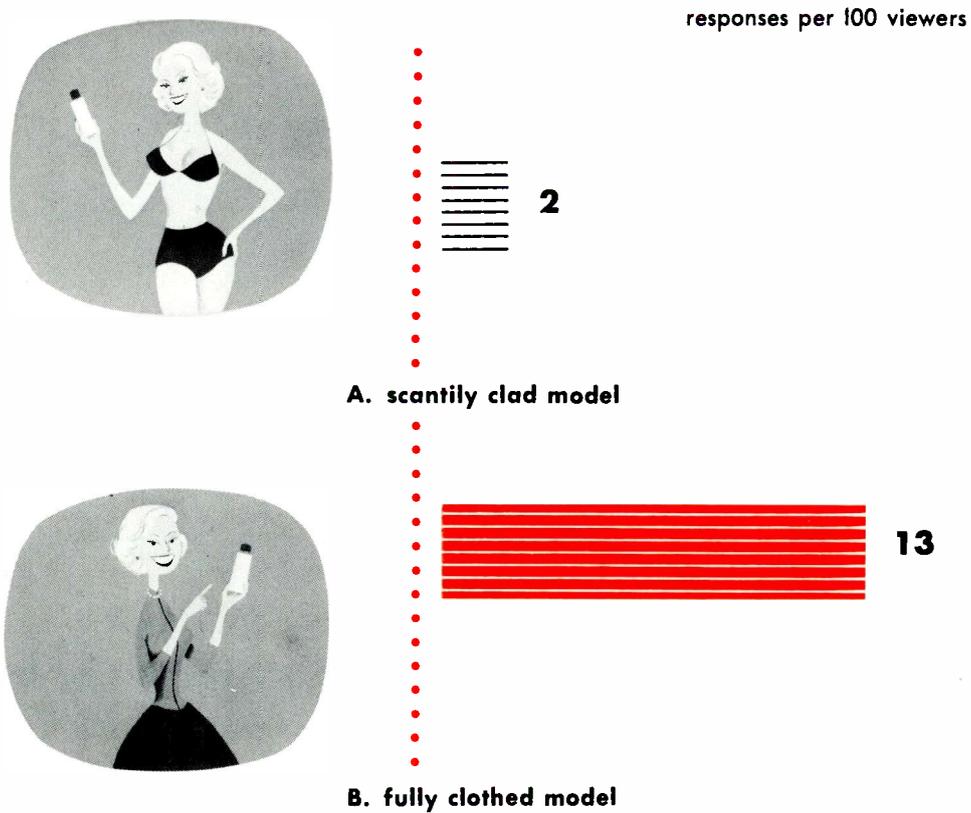
In a preceding section we pointed out that some extraneous camera tricks and effects can actually weaken the recall of the sales point. A similar factor is involved in the selection of presenters. Schwerin results are quite uncompromising in this respect. They strongly urge: Avoid a presenter who distracts.

On the next page are represented the essentials of two different lead-ins for a lotion commercial. The introduction was made by a very attractive, scantily clad model. She was much too photogenic (or too much of her was too photogenic) for the advertiser's purpose. She proved to be highly distracting.

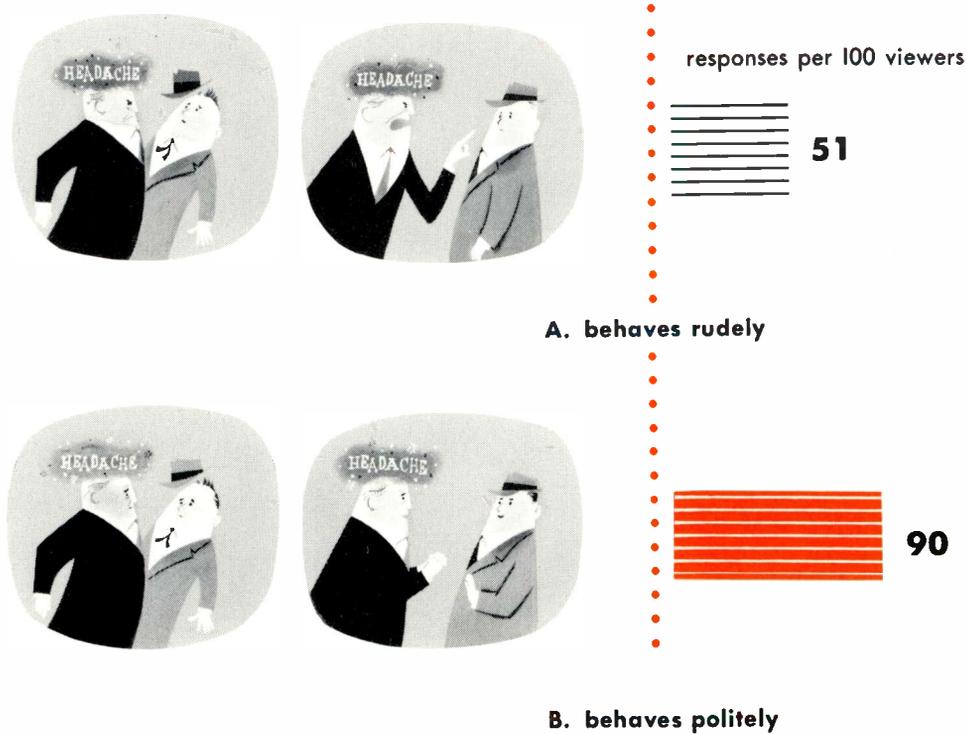
The sales point was recalled by only 2% of the respondents. The viewers evidently couldn't take their minds off her and pay attention to the sales points she was discussing.

When the lead-in was made by the same model, more fully clothed, response rose more than six-fold to 13 per 100 viewers. In this version, the presenter did not distract from the sales message which followed.

effect of distracting presenter



viewer sympathy



Very frequently small video touches can contribute to or detract from the viewer's sympathy towards the presenter — with marked effect on the recall the commercials will win. The scores shown here relate to two different commercials for a headache remedy, in each of which the demonstration revolved about characters who were really suffering.

In Commercial “A” the presenter was exceedingly obnoxious. He bumped into a stranger, rudely snapped at him and made no apology. Even if it were the headache which caused him to act like that, the fact remains that he anta-

gonized viewers. The sales point in this version won 51 responses per 100 viewers, while a second commercial involving a more courteous presenter won 90. In that commercial the character was also in great pain. But when he ran into the other, he apologized. Because of the manner in which he was presented he won sympathy from the viewers — and a much higher recall for the sales point.

In many television commercials there are occasions where viewer sympathy can easily be enlisted. Even so simple a thing as “please” and “thank you” by the demonstrator to an assistant who is handing him props can make a big difference. They take up scarcely any time; they avoid the risk of offending viewers who expect such amenities.

The star as a presenter

No discussion on the commercial presenter can be complete without some consideration of the use of the star of the program as the product presenter. The figures indicate that no pat rules can be laid down in this area. We can summarize the findings in this manner: the star can contribute substantially to the effectiveness of the commercial; however, the mere presence of the star holding the advertised package does not automatically insure higher recall. It all depends on how he or she is used.

In one commercial, for example, the star was on the scene while a demonstration of the production was being made. Except for his presence, he made no other contribution to the commercial, which won 12 responses per 100 viewers. In a second version, the star assisted in the demonstration . . . asked leading questions . . . showed himself to be visibly impressed by the product. That treatment achieved 20 responses per 100 viewers.

In other words, if the star will seriously assume the role of commercial presenter, that action can be highly effective. But if he relies too heavily on his show personality and does not, in effect, get behind the counter and sell, the commercial will be less successful. The star has to play up to the product. Some talent can achieve this with great ease; other personalities seem to have considerable difficulty in achieving this transformation.

* * * * *

In summary, here are the “do’s” and “dont’s” to be observed in connection with the presenter for the product: Identify the speaker clearly, without waste words or motions. Avoid using a faceless voice; try to establish a direct relationship between the speaker and the viewer. Select a presenter who is compatible with the product. Where possible, use a suitable authority. Avoid presenters who distract or alienate the viewer.

KEEP THE SETTING AUTHENTIC

The word “setting” here has a much wider connotation than the stage set used in the commercial. The setting should be so planned that every element in it should contribute to the impression the advertiser wishes to make. No elements surrounding the presenter or the demonstration should be included if they detract from that impression.

authenticity of roles

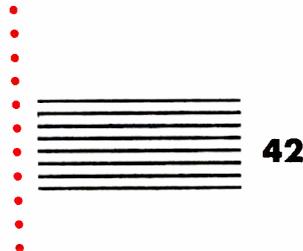


A. male m. c. in the kitchen



B. housewife in the kitchen

responses per 100 viewers



One yawning trap that looms here is the temptation to “get some life into the commercial” by creating incongruous situations. For example:

The product was a prepared mix. The program m.c., who had been doing a straight selling job in this series, believed that he could improve his presentation if allowed to inject some life and humor into the commercial.

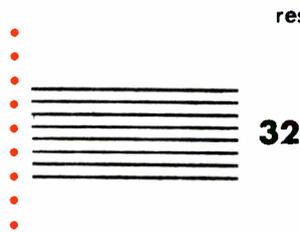
One commercial had the m.c. and his assistant trying their hand in the kitchen to demonstrate the product. The demonstration was boisterous and good-natured, and the results they obtained were exactly what was to be expected from a clumsy male at the oven. Their efforts may have rated well as entertainment. But the routine failed as a commercial because the announcer was out of place in the role he assumed and the way he played it. There was nothing real or authentic about any part of the situation, and it didn't produce nearly as high a recall of the sales ideas as did a more orthodox treatment. (This case does not imply that the comedy approach is perforce less effective; use of a humorous setting depends primarily on what the sales objective is.)

The other version was along more expected — call it cornier — lines. There was the usual beaming mother bringing muffins (made with the advertised mix) to the table. There was the inevitable family group sitting around the table eagerly awaiting this new treat. It was all a nice, familiar, domestic setting. And it achieved a Schwerin score of 88, whereas the gagged-up version received a score of 42.

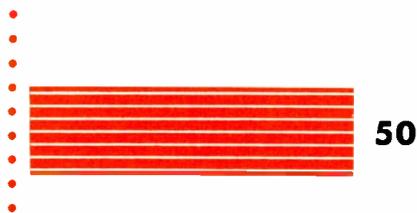
It's very seldom that the differences between one commercial and another in the same series will be so sharply etched. But the exaggerations we have just seen have the virtue of nailing down the point which this research has established.

Even a subtle improvement in the authenticity of the setting may make a significant difference in the recall of the commercial, as our next example shows.

enhancing sensory impressions



A. mother bringing pancakes to table



B. pancakes on griddle

In a commercial for a pancake flour there was a sequence of a steaming plate of hot-cakes being brought to the table by the mother. The dialogue was full of praise for the color, lightness and taste of the pancakes. It was a good commercial, and rated several cuts above others in the same series. It had the right setting. It was authentic. It won a recall of 32%. But it was still susceptible to improvement.

In a different commercial they created still another good setting for the product. They showed the pancakes just about done, right on the griddle. Then they moved into the sequence of the dish being brought to the table, etc. The extra setting — the cakes on the griddle — produced another favorable sensory impression of the product. You could almost smell them cooking . . . you could almost taste them.

Those cakes cooking on the griddle created a gustatory anticipation which showed up strongly in the findings. The commercial received 50 responses per 100 viewers.

An additional and appropriate setting evoked new sensory impressions. According to test scores, the more these authentic touches can be introduced, the more effective the commercial will be.

SUMMARY

These, then, are the basic techniques for increasing commercial effectiveness:

Correlate audio and video

Demonstrate

Keep it simple

Use the right presenter

Keep the setting authentic

These principles are not based on the hunches, or opinions, or even the experiences of any single individual — however brilliant. They have evolved from actual tests of several thousand commercials for a multitude of different products. And like all principles relating to creative work, they operate interdependently.

More significantly, they require intelligent application which must be governed by the particular problem posed by each individual commercial. Blind and literal adherence to these points at the expense of good judgment can never result in effective commercials. Use common sense might well be added here as a sixth principle.

We do not, of course, naively believe that a simple listing will automatically result in a perfect batting average for every commercial produced in accordance with these points. But we do feel the advertiser who keeps these principles in mind . . . checks storyboard elements against them . . . eliminates gross violations of them . . . can substantially raise the performance level of his TV commercials.

The advertiser who does so will be even more thoroughly convinced of television's tremendous sales power and will see that its achievement potential is continually rising.

* * * * *

APPENDIX

Schwerin Research Corporation was founded in 1946, but the development of its methodology began 11 years earlier. Preliminary work included qualitative radio tests by Horace Schwerin and associates before hundreds of club and studio-groups between 1935 and 1941, followed by Schwerin's wartime studies for the Army on how to make "G. I. commercials" and training messages more effective.

SRC's first six months were devoted to a project, backed by the National Broadcasting Company, designed to establish the applicability of the methodology to the practical testing of programs. The organization then began testing for radio clients, subsequently entering television testing, as well as qualitative research in other communications and informational areas.

The natural development of SRC's efforts moved from qualitative program testing to increased client interest in the relationship between shows and commercials; this led to developing techniques for measuring remembrance and belief of commercials concurrently with the program tests.

The procedure now used may be summarily described as follows:

Audiences are attracted through a variety of media including direct mail, spot announcements, street handouts, door to door distribution, phone calls or car cards. Each person interested in participating in a test fills out and sends in a postcard questionnaire giving information about a few key personal characteristics. On the basis of this information a roughly representative cross-section of about 350 people are invited to each session. They receive premium gifts in return for attending.

The sessions are held at SRC's own private theatre in New York, in which the special equipment required for showing and testing programs and commercials is permanently set up.

Each session begins with a short orientation by the test director. The audience members then fill out a detailed questionnaire, which covers both standard characteristics (sex, age, education, rental group and so on) and the factors having to do with the programs and products being studied at the session. They then view the kinescope of a television program, at intervals during which numbers are flashed on a second, smaller screen; each number signals the audience members to indicate on score-sheets with corresponding numbers whether they liked, didn't like, or were indifferent to the portion of the show they saw since the last previous number was flashed. ("Good," "fair" and "poor" are the three choices given the audience to check, with "interesting," "mildly interesting" and "not interesting" being substituted for certain types of programs.)

Immediately after viewing the program, the audience members are asked to write down, on a blank sheet of paper, the name of the product that was advertised and everything they remember having seen or heard said about it in the commercials. Additionally, they are asked to indicate whether they believe certain key claims made in the commercials to be true or false.

The remembrance and belief test is followed by a discussion period, in which individual audience members volunteer their comments regarding the show and the commercials. These comments are then rephrased by the test director in the form of questions for the whole audience to vote upon. Some prephrased questions, based on past experience with shows of a similar type, are also used.

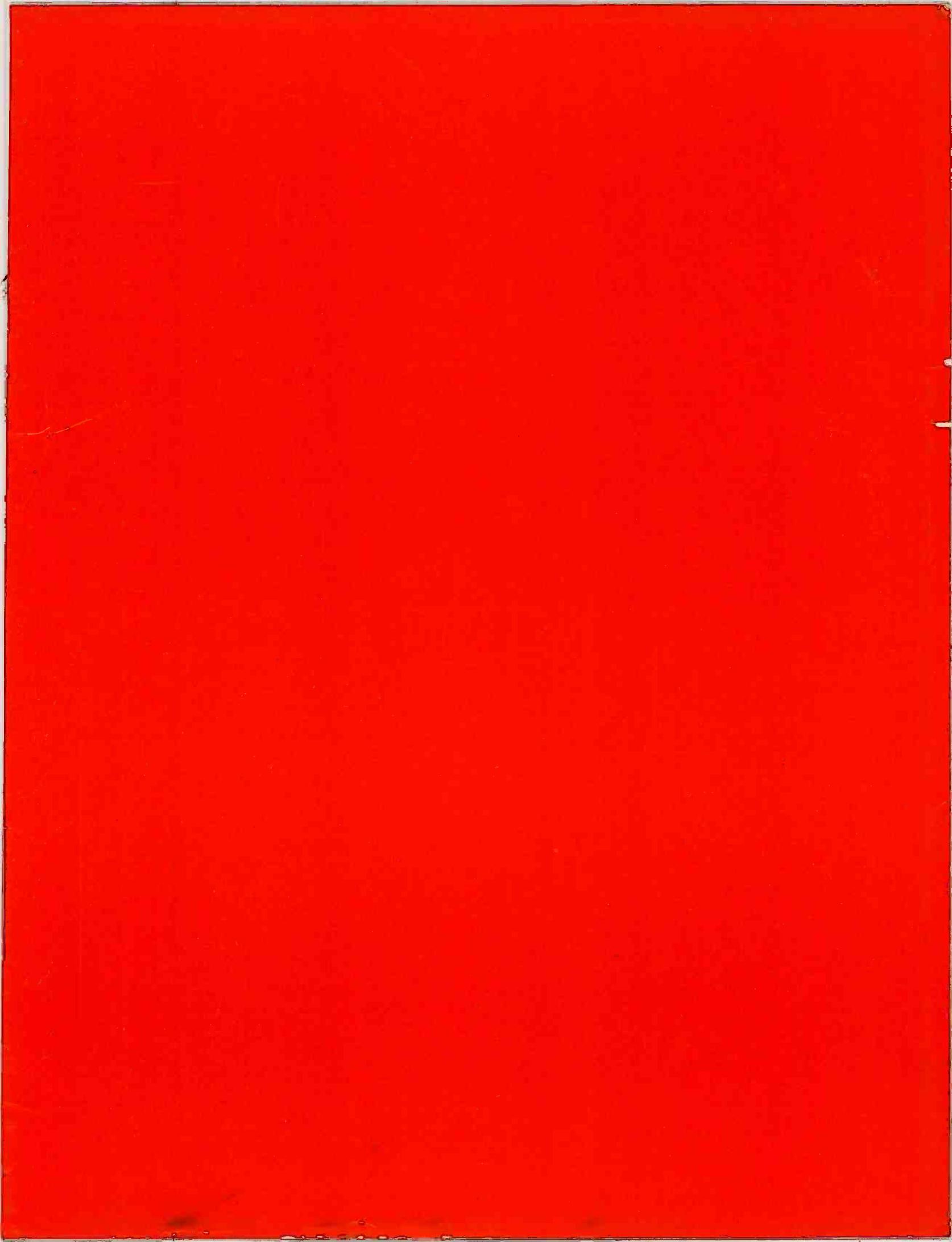
Customarily, two programs are tested in the above manner at each session.

The session audience is not the final sample, which is post-selected on the basis of important factors. The latter are determined by an analysis run on the whole audience data, and vary for different programs and commercials. When a show and its commercials are being studied for the first time it is tested at two sessions, so that the original factor analysis is made on a total audience of more than 600 respondents.

Samples are controlled on a minimum of three factors, with as many as six sub-groups within a factor.

NATIONAL BROADCASTING COMPANY

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